

CONOR MCPHERSON'S THE WEIR: NEW MASTER OF IRISH STORYTELLING

CONOR MCPHERSON'UN THE WEIR OYUNU: İRLANDA ÖYKÜ GELENEĞİNİN YENİ USTASI

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the contemporary Irish playwright Conor McPherson's award-winning play The Weir (1997), as a depiction of Ireland's storytelling culture, especially in the countryside. Critics and scholars have frequently characterized Irish writers as great story-tellers and Conor McPherson, who has been considered as the new master of old-fashioned Irish art of storytelling, continues this tradition. In The Weir the dwellers of the local pub occupy themselves by drinking, teasing each other and recollecting events from past times. By reciting a sequence of narratives in the form of dramatic monologues, these men wish to impress a young woman from Dublin who has rented a neighborhood house. They familiarize her to this idyllic part of Ireland by telling a series of stories that include fairies, ghosts, mystery and the supernatural. While acknowledging an ages-old tradition, - a tale of local folklore about fairies - McPherson explores moving themes of loss, abandonment, loneliness and regret through haunting and entertaining ghost stories.

Keywords: Conor McPherson, The Weir, Storytelling, Monologue, Ghost Stories

ÖZET

Bu çalışma günümüz İrlandalı oyun yazarı Conor McPherson'ın 1997 yılında yazdığı bol ödüllü The Weir adlı oyununu özellikle İrlanda kırsalının en yaygın geleneği olan öykü anlatımı açısından inceler. Tiyatro eleştirmenleri ve araştırmacılar sık sık İrlandalı yazarların öykü anlatımı alanındaki ustalığını vurgular. McPherson yazdığı oyunlarda İrlanda'nın eski bir geleneği olan öykü anlatımı sanatının yeni ustası olarak dikkat çeker. The Weir oyununda orta-yaşlı, işçi sınıfından erkek karakterler her zamanki yaptıkları gibi mahalli meyhanede biraraya gelirler. İçki eşliğinde, sohbet eder, şakalaşır ve geçmişi yadederler. Karakterler, Dublin'den gelen ve İrlanda'nın kırsal bölgesine yeni yerleşen genç bir kadın karakteri etkilemek üzere dramatik monolog formatında öyküler anlatırlar. Peri, hayalet, gizem ve doğaüstü olaylar içeren öyküler vasıtasıyla Valerie'ye buldukları kırsal yöreyi tanıtır. Karakterlerin birbirlerine anlattıkları bazen eğlenceli bazen düşündürücü öyküler sayesinde, McPherson nesillerdir süregelen öykü geleneğine dikkat çekerken ayrıca karakterlerin yalnızlık, sıkıntı, pişmanlık gibi duygular içeren iç dünyalarını yansıtır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Conor McPherson, The Weir, Öyküleyici Anlatım, Monolog, Hayalet Öyküleri

Irish drama and Irish playwrights have played a significant role on world theatre. As a contemporary playwright Conor McPherson has inherited a rather strong Irish dramatic tradition which boasts its fame with chief names such as Wilde, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Congreve, G.B. Shaw, J.M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, Samuel Beckett, and Brian Friel. These world-renowned playwrights have not only created stories that have become central to Western literature, but they have also created new theatrical attitudes politically and stylistically. Within the twentieth century, from the efforts of the Irish literary revivalists like W. B. Yeats to extremely important government efforts, Irish folklore has been assured a central place within the identity of the Republic of Ireland – a country of tales, myths, and legends and thus Irish storytellers have become world-famous for their wit and inventiveness. The extraordinary range of Irish stories comes from a folklore tradition more than 2,000 years old, which successfully blended Celtic, Christian, and English influences to create some of the most distinctive oral literature in all of Europe. Although the traditional format for Irish storytelling is dying out, its legacy continues in books and in poetry. One of the most popular themes for stories has been the spirit world. Ireland has been widely known to be inhabited by all manner of fairies. The fairies were notoriously mischievous, and a vast array of stories described the mysterious tricks they played on innocent mortals.

McPherson, as one of the most prolific young Irish playwrights along with Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr, finds a new theatrical voice and device in order to present contemporary Ireland. Irish folklore, which is full of versatile, witty and inventive stories, provides great resources for McPherson's plays. He makes use of monologues and storytelling technique in his plays which have mostly linear narratives. One needs to bear in mind that, on one hand, the contemporary Irish playwrights are fostered by Celtic folk tales and are nourished by the values and stories of the old days; on the other hand, they have inherited a very different Ireland from their predecessors. Once a traditional rural culture, today Ireland has become a predominantly urban country that is supported by the global economy and is part of the new information age. Indeed, Heilpern is among many other critics who does not approve of the backward-looking view of Ireland that seems to dominate the new dramas with their impoverished rural types, the seemingly endless supply of stormy nights, of ghosts, goblins and Guinness: "It's as if Ireland were still locked in the turn of the 20th century and its flattery of fanciful stereotypes of melancholy Irish manhood. As if it has never become a part of the contemporary globe" (Heilpern, 1999). However, McPherson brings old and new Ireland together to question the place of myth and storytelling in a skeptical modern world.

In *The Weir*, he uses the idea of super-

natural visitation as a way of exploring his favorite theme of the ingrained solitude of the Irish male. He uses typical Gothic equipment to recognize an ages-old tradition, the idea of wayfarers assembling under siege to swap information and accounts of lives as they do in Boccaccio's Decameron, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. *The Weir* makes a lively case for the spirit of that tradition and for the important value of telling stories. In this respect, this study will begin with 'storytelling,' which is an inseparable part of McPherson's writing presented in the form of monologues and uninterrupted speeches. Then *The Weir* will be interpreted in the light of storytelling, dramatic monologue and the "pub play" genre.

Conor McPherson, known for his "amazing gift for storytelling," employs storytelling device in the form of monologues to enable the audiences to enter the minds of the characters. His plays such as *Rum and Vodka* (1994), *The Good Thief*, *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995), *St. Nicholas*, *The Weir* (1996), *Dublin Carol* (1999), *Port Authority* (2001), *Come on Over*, *Shining City* (2004), *The Seafarer* (2006), and *The Birds* (2009), demonstrate the playwright's mastery in using storytelling as a device in dramatic plays.

Storytelling and monologue have a significant status in narratology. Narratology deals with uninterrupted speech mostly in the form of monologues. In reality-based drama, monologue may theatricalise what

Doritt Cohn has described as the "transparent mind, allowing audiences entry into the characters' consciousness; their motivations, history, or point of view" (Cohn, 1978: p.5). McPherson's plays are based on narratology. In this respect, his monologues reveal his characters' consciousness and their moments of epiphany powerfully especially when sharpened by lighting and staging effects. As Castagno observes monologue allows telescopic glimpses of characters beyond the capacity of conversational discourse, thus ensuring a greater possibility of "knowing the character" beyond the plot-limiting function as an "agent of the action" (Castagno, 2001). Indeed, each one of McPherson's attentively crafted monologues in *The Weir* and elsewhere contemplate traditional structures of play structure: beginning (exposition: sense of place and context), middle (discovery: climax, realization), end (reversal, choice, resolution).

The monologues are effective in portraying the transition of the character's mental and emotional states. McPherson mainly achieves capturing the audience's interest through gothic stories. Indeed his texts composed for both the stage and screen, such as *The Seafarer* and *The Eclipse* respectively, are equipped with gothic narratives. Galvin, too, examines "the monologued ghost stories that shape *The Weir*" (Galvin, 2010). Galvin interprets that McPherson views ghosts and supernatural experiences as metaphors for "the

unknown, the existential and the unfinished business of our lives.” (Galvin, 2010) Similarly, Ronald K. Fried has highlighted the presence of fairies, ghosts and other supernatural types in McPherson’s “otherworldly tales”. In an interview with Fried, McPherson has acknowledged that there are a lot of people who have nowhere to go in his plays and that in that kind of situation the characters can talk to each other. In the same interview he maintains that one tries to communicate a feeling and that one is “supposed to walk out of the theater *feeling* different, not thinking different”. For McPherson theatre is “the most magical” storytelling art form that can draw an audience into “a kind of a trance—into a kind of magical, communal place which no other art form really does.” (Fried, 2014).

In this context, many critics have explored McPherson’s “magical” fantastic world of theatre, featuring storytelling and demons in his plays. Rawson accounts that storytelling is the only therapy Ireland believes in as it helps to deal with the demons (Rawson, 2009). Likewise for Machray, the audiences, like the characters, are slowly drawn into the world of the afterlife in this land of storytellers (Machray, 2011). Again, Jasper Rees expresses that *The Weir* owes its popularity to “the old thing about ghost stories’ (Rees, 2014).

McPherson structures his ghost stories in the form of monologues. Indeed he began his career by writing monologues for the stage. Many of his subsequent plays have

incorporated the extended monologue as a core dramatic device. Contemporary drama critic and scholar Clare Wallace analyses the monologue form in McPherson’s plays extensively and she underlines a relationship between monologue and questions of ethics. Wallace highlights “the pivotal quality of ambivalence that might serve to distinguish the modern monologue from its predecessors” (See Chambers, 2012: 27). In this context, McPherson’s monologues are unclear in which there are not clear distinctions between a revelatory, authentic truth and lies. Wallace argues that this achieves a “narratological provisionality, uncertainty or even failure”. (See Chambers, 2012: 27). This sense of uncertainty revealed in the stories reflects the characters’ ambiguous psyche who live in a “new” Ireland with its economic prosperity. The characters in the play represent the rural Irish people’s adaptation processes in the European culture of the twenty-first century due to the fact that McPherson’s characters are not part of the nation’s recent economic success. They are rather the backward native Irishmen who have difficulties in adjusting to the internationalized and business driven society. We see that McPherson’s characters do not favour the economic changes and they feel uncomfortable, aimless and unsettled in this society.

In order to portray this sense of disorientation and disturbance in the modern cosmopolitan world, McPherson revitalizes Irish Celtic tradition of storytelling by

dealing with metaphysical matters such as demons, ghosts and spirits. He uses theatre as a magical place and benefits from the supernatural because “it opens a door for us into a way of exploring our darkest fears when we feel loneliest and alienated” (See McPherson’s Interview for “Theatre Talk”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93RWrTkGSE4>). Indeed the lonely characters in *The Weir*, find a way out into their subconscious through the act of storytelling where they encounter their angst and despair. McPherson has observed that audiences are really tuned in and absorbed by the supernatural stories.

The supernatural stories have a close affiliation with drinking, which is another notable characteristic of Irish culture. In almost all his plays McPherson depicts a widespread problem with too much drinking in Irish culture. He believes that drinking, which also highlights a sense of aimlessness, is part of the Irish national character. In the same interview for “Theatre Talk”, McPherson blames Catholicism, which has a huge element of guilt and helplessness, for Irish drinking: “What underlies the demon of alcoholism is the feeling of inadequacy, guilt and helplessness, feeling of doom, gloom, fear and paranoia” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93RWrTkGSE4>). Similarly, in another interview he underlines the fact that “Drinking is everywhere, it’s like nothing happens without it. Courtships, weddings, funerals, going to the theatre, everything: it’s always alcohol”

(Costa, 2006). Indeed, the pub is an imperative part of cultural, social and musical life in Ireland. Pubs are not only places to have a drink but also one can “philosophize on the meaning of life, ruminate on global politics, listen to a poetry reading, tap your feet to a traditional session, feast on delicious food or just enjoy the quiet settling of a pint of Guinness in front of a crackling fire” (<http://www.discoverireland.com/us/about-ireland/culture/>).

The Weir, in which the inner lives of five characters in a country pub setting are exposed, was put on stage at three different world-renowned theaters in the late 1990s: the Royal Court in London, the Gate in Dublin, and the Walter Kerr in New York. The play won the Lawrence Olivier BBC Award as the “Best New Play” of 1997–98 in London, and the playwright has been declared as the most promising playwright receiving the Critics’ Circle Award. The play has been described as “beautiful and devious” (Brantley, 1999: 1). Theatre critic Brantley has cherished the playwright as “a first-rate story-teller” (Brantley, 1999: 1). Indeed, many critics and scholars drive attention to the poetry and magic of McPherson’s work; they have been fascinated with his “tales of lost souls and troubled lives” (Costa, 2006).

McPherson embodies accurately the human condition, especially of men who are trapped and secluded in their inner lives. This sense of privacy and entrapment actually has been designating Irish literatu-

re for many years. The playwright has spoken with certainty about what distinguishes Irish drama from other English-speaking drama. He believes that Irish playwrights, hurt by poverty, pessimism and Catholic guilt, get “stuck in an inner life”, hardly ever moving their dramas outside one room, while Brits put the world on stage (Clapp, 2004). In the same way, Billington argues that *The Weir* offers an extraordinary metaphor for Ireland (Billington, 2000). McPherson’s stage directions highlight the fact related with country pubs in Ireland: “The bar is part of a house and the house is part of a farm.” (*W*: 3). Like in *The Seafarer*, a play of five male characters, the characters in *The Weir* are caught in their private lives distanced from women because of fear and respect until Finbar brings Valerie into their circle. Indeed, McPherson is fascinated and inspired as a playwright by the remoteness of the topography and the people who inhabit this countryside in the West of Ireland. The play is set in a representative milieu of a small [pub](#) in a fictional town called Carrick in contemporary rural Ireland, which is said to be in the West of [Ireland](#), near Northwest [Leitrim](#), or [Sligo](#). A handful of people are set in a dark, derelict and not particularly well-stocked bar which is situated near a dam (the Weir of the title). Bordered by Sligo, Roscommon, Cavan, Longford, Fermanagh, Donegal, and the North Atlantic, Co. Leitrim itself is at a sort of crossways and the stories told in *The Weir* have specific lineage throughout Irish folklore. Touched by the West

of Ireland opened up through W. B. Yeats’ Sligo and the Northern Gaeltacht through Donegal, it is a county suspended between traditions. The title of the play refers to the power of water which literally highlights Ireland’s geographical configuration as an island. A weir, the dramatist has explained, “refers to a dam, something that holds something else from overflowing” (Interview for “Theatre Talk”).

The play’s “West of Ireland” setting is important and traditional because when Irish writers first began to use the English language to recount the stories of the island, they logically looked west, away from the British colonial pressure. This journey westward led many of these writers to the Aran Islands at the far end of the west coast of Europe. The solitude and romantic wildness of Ireland exists at its utmost level on Aran Islands. The honored memorials of Christian piety and Celtic worship are numerous scattered over the surface of the Aran Islands, which describe the passion and innocence of these islanders. It is this same solitude and wildness of Leitrim that appealed to McPherson when he was writing *The Weir*. On holidays and at weekends McPherson would often go down on the train to visit his grandfather in Leitrim, which outlines the isolated setting for the barroom in the play. He believes that the remoteness of this other Ireland had a profound effect on him as a writer.

Hence McPherson’s aim is to portray the obsessions and purity of the islanders

in the West of Ireland who dwell in a kind of isolated place representative of the other Ireland away from globalism and cosmopolitanism. The Weir includes little physical action, and its main events have already taken place in the past. The characters remember past events in their narratives. In its first moments, the play would seem to reflect the ultimate cliché of a storyteller's opener: "It was a dark and stormy night" (W: 21). The play's characters arrive at staggered intervals. They consist of lonely old Jack, who is a Guinness lover and a garage owner; Brendan the pub owner; Jim, the odd-job man in his 40's who lives with his old mother; Finbar, the successful local boy, a married man and the new comer Valerie who enters the pub unexpectedly. The one woman in the play, Valerie, is being brought in for a drink by Finbar to be introduced to the natives.

The men tease each other about drinking. They define drinking as "medicinal" (W: 14). Their interchange of small talk reveals an attachment to this rural, wild, and unsheltered area. Brendan complains about his sisters' forcing him "to sell the top field" which is for him "a grand spot" (W: 13). The friends gather in this pub for a drink and a chat, but that day is different as they will be accompanied by Valerie, the Dublin lady. Jack gives Brendan the news and the new gossip, that Finbar has sold the house to a new resident who is a fine single girl from Dublin, and that Finbar is nearly leaving the wife just to have a chance with her.

Finbar is the flashy, well-to-do real estate man the others envy. Brendan opposes and gets furious at Finbar: "I don't want him using in here for that sort of carry on. A married man like him" (W: 6). They think that Finbar is "only having a thrill. Bringing her around" and to tell them "You are single and you couldn't get a woman near this place" (W: 7). They find the idea "intrusive, bad manners and juvenile" (W: 6). They make fun of Finbar by calling him "the Finbar Mack world of big business" (W: 6). Right from the beginning of the play, Finbar represents the successful cosmopolitan businessman who can adapt with the global world economy while other characters are stuck in their inner lives in this secluded part of Ireland.

The characters' casual bar joking and friendly local talk and gossip, in fact reveal the characters' isolation. Soon it is clear that the characters are seekers of refuge from the bluster of the outside world. As they familiarize Valerie to the area, we learn that the place is unsheltered with harsh winds. It is a grand spot all along for going for a walk all down the cliffs with amazing views. We learn about the "country ways" and that this townland used to be quite important back a few hundred years ago. It was like the capital of the county. Finbar tells Valerie not to mind these "country fellas". He says: "They're only jealous Valerie because I went to town to seek my fortune. And they all stayed out here on the bog picking their holes" (W: 13). Valerie acts as a

sort of catalyst for the men in the pub, and reminiscences about an unexplained event at the local house she has rented set them off a round of ghost stories that get creepier gradually. The men are eager to entertain her. Their stories start out innocently enough with tales of local folklore about fairies.

The play begins almost as a comedy of manners, as the local men try to entertain Valerie. Jack tells a story about the house Valerie has just rented. He remembers the tale told by Maura Nealon, who had lived in the house as a child.

At first Jack has prepared the story for a laugh by emphasizing the spooky atmosphere:

And in those days, Valerie, as you know, there was no electricity out here. And there's no dark like a winter night in the country. And there was a wind like this one tonight, howling and whistling in off the sea. You hear it under the door and it's like someone singing. Singing under the door at you. It was this type of night now. Am I setting the scene for you? (W: 21).

The events in Jack's apparently entertaining story happened around 1910, when Maura Nealon was a young girl. Maura was alone with her mother when she suddenly heard an insistent knocking on the door. Maura's mother, Bridie, did not let her answer the door. That night they did not even get up to refill the turf in order to warm the house. Frightened, they only

sat together until the other family members came home from a dance. The mother did not tell anyone about the incident, but later she asked the priest to bless the doors and windows in her house. On learning that the house had been built on the fairy road the family members agreed that it was the fairies that knocked on the door. Maura reports another haunted story: "There was a bit of knocking then, she said. And fierce load of dead birds in all the hedge and all this, but that was it. That's the story" (W: 22). Jack's spooky tale ends with laughter and more fresh drinks. Finbar comments that such spooky stories are "only old cod" and they are foolish, but Valerie opposes by insisting on a presence of a mystery in the supernatural tales and foreshadows the coming of her heart-rending story. Right from the first story, which resides in itself elements of mysterious knockings and visitations, the characters introduce a structure of a fairy legend. As Bourke has expressed fairy tales have long been told "to amuse adults and frighten children, to entertain tourists, and to mark the distance we have come from the supposed credulity of our ancestors." (Bourke, 1996: 6).

After Jack's haunting story about Valerie's house, it is Finbar's turn to recount another ghost story in which his neighbour's daughter was terrified and she insisted that there was a woman on the stairs looking at her. After his father's death, Finbar was living alone in the country. One day his neighbor asked him to help her

with a family problem. In this story, Mrs. Walsh's teenage daughter, Niamh, had become scared insisting that a spirit was after her. (*W*: 24). Niamh told Finbar that she saw a woman on the staircases staring at her. Niamh was first taken care of by a doctor who prescribed her some sedatives and then by a priest who blessed the house. Later, that night, the brother phoned from Longford to tell them that the old woman, his next door neighbour, who nursed them, had been found dead at the bottom of the stairs. Finbar was distressed by the incident and when he went to his own house his shock continued. He remembers being desperate for a cigarette and how he was unable to move to get one. He believes that it is a coincidence but he could not go up the stairs to go to bed that night; he thought there was something on the stairs. That was the time when he decided to leave the countryside and moved to town to get rid of loneliness. Thinking that it was dark and lonely up in that part of the county, he moved down to Carrick "into the lights" (*W*: 25). The mysterious stories follow one after the other.

Finbar's chat about Nuala Donnelly's getting married the next day, leads to the next story. In the next tale, Jim recites a story from twenty years ago. He remembers that he and Nuala's father were hired by a priest to dig a grave in a churchyard. That day Jim was ill with the flu and he was feeling dizzy because of whiskey. The priest apparently had arranged a secret funeral.

After they had dug the grave, another man from the church told him that he had dug the wrong grave. The man asked him to dig another site next to the place where a young girl had recently been buried. Jim ignored him but after a few days Jim noticed the man's photo in a newspaper in relation with a pervert's story: "And Jesus, when I heard that, you know? If it was him. And he wanted to go down in the grave with the . . . little girl. Even after they were gone. It didn't bear thinking about" (*W*: 33). It turned out that the stranger was actually a pervert who wanted to go into the grave with a little girl. With Jim's narrative, the stories move from fairytale to horror story and the language gets stronger and the tales darken. Finbar has had to interfere with the situation and has promised Valerie that there will be no more spooky tales: "Ah that's the end of them now. We've had enough of them old stories, they're only an old cod" (*W*: 37). Despite being labeled as "old cod", still the men's narratives in which they tell tales of mystery and horror bear a sense of realism, pain, melancholy and tragedy. Clearly, there is a witty interaction of rivalry for getting Valerie's attention. Nevertheless, there is a point to the stories. Not only do we get to know the characters of the individuals better, they also lead up to Valerie's grotesque and destabilizing story which is the focal point of the play.

To the men's surprise, the night takes a strange and unexpected twist by Valerie's story. Until Valerie's narration, the local

men appear comfortable in the realms of familiar and exotic folklore of Gaeltacht with tales featuring fairies and unhappy spirits. In contrast, the final two stories are more unsettling, as first Valerie and then Jack disclose personal losses that haunt them. The most emotional tale is the penultimate story told by Valerie, which combines a supernatural tale with the loss of her own child. She reveals the real-life circumstances of her grief as she narrates her only child's fatal accident in a swimming lesson. After their daughter's death, her relationship with her husband has become very hard. Those days Valerie did not know how to cope with her daughter's loss while her husband coped by concentrating on his work. Most notably, though, she got a fuzzy telephone call one morning. Through the faint line she could hear her daughter's voice, asking Valerie to come and collect her. Valerie was not sure whether this was a dream or her leaving them had been a dream. She rushed to the house that her daughter described where she found herself sedated by a doctor. Her husband insisted on medical treatment which would help her cope with the situation: "But I just thought he should face up to what happened to me. He was insisting I get some treatment, and then . . . everything would be okay. But you know, what can help that if she's out there? She still . . . she still needs me" (W: 40). Refusing the treatment, she preferred a change and decided to move to this remote part of the country where she expects to get some peace and quiet. Valerie's moving account,

which gives the play its highest emotional ground, has disturbed the men. The three stories that have preceded Valerie's dramatic monologue have organized and prepared the climax of the play when eventually she exposes her buried pain. This change of role as Valerie transforms from a mere listener to an influential narrator, or rather a female invader of male domain, generates powerful emotions. The men are moved by Valerie's trauma. Jim takes her hand and consoles her. Interestingly, Valerie's monologue has echoes of the preceding stories. Theatre critic Kerrane analyzes the play in structural principles suggesting that Valerie's climactic narrative repeats plot elements from each of the preceding stories. Indeed the sounds of knocking in Jack's tale of the fairy road is repeated in Valerie's story as she reports her daughter's telephone call: "There were children knocking in the walls, and the man was standing across the road, and he was looking up and he was going to cross the road" (W: 39). Similarly Finbar's story is echoed in the name of Valerie's daughter, Niamh, which is the same as that of the girl who received threatening messages. (Kerrane, 2006: 115).

The male characters' engagement in telling old stories in order to pass the time is challenged by Valerie's narration as they have never expected to hear something as personal and real as hers. However, Finbar tries to find some kind of logic for the ghostly stories that the characters insist they have lived through. For example he

argues that Jim was delirious with the flu at the time, and that the woman in Jack's story was a drinker. He insists that these are only cod and hallucinations. As a pub owner, he knows all about what a few drinks will do to people. Similarly, Valerie's story in which she speaks of the recent death of her child and a bizarre experience thereafter may have been supernatural but more likely merely a symptom of trauma. Before Finbar leaves the pub, he attempts to justify and rationalize in order to demystify the stories. Later we learn more about Jack as he consoles Valerie. Brendan the proprietor invites Jack and Valerie to sit near the stove as it gets colder into the night. As they drink glasses of brandy, Jack tells about his life story which is presently marked by daily loneliness of working in his garage. Motivated by Valerie's story, Jack tells his second tale, the last one of the evening. He recounts his loneliness in a plain story of lost love, with no ghostly shadows at all. His story involves his regrets at missing an opportunity at love. When he was young his girl friend suggested they move to Dublin. However, because of "an irrational fear" of leaving, he could not leave the countryside. After she went to Dublin, she married another man. Jack's story of lost love "wasn't exactly a ghostly story" but he is so much taken up with ghosts as he says "we'll all be ghosts soon enough, says you, ha?" (*W*: 47). As opposed to the other characters who are troubled by apparitions, Jack is uneasy by regrets. Jack's life story may be interpreted as an evocation of typical Irish

countrymen that are reminiscent of James Joyce's characters especially in *Dubliners*, who were trapped and paralyzed in Dublin. Nevertheless, there is a note of hope and friendship at the end. Valerie is quick to adapt to this society of men and she agrees to join them frequently in the pub. Clearly, she has become a source of fascination to this house of bachelors.

The pub becomes "a site of both conflict and bonding" (Kerrane, 2006: 107). Here McPherson uses storytelling as a device to expose the audience that these funny and chilling stories are a mix of rumour and local legend. They may also be hallucinations as they are all accompanied with drinks. While reconciling the routine and the metaphysical, the playwright reveals moving themes of loss, abandonment, loneliness and regret. The play takes storytelling concept and adjusts it into a conventional play structure whereby the characters tell spooky stories to one another rather than directly to the audience. The playwright depicts the desperation of Irish small-town life masterfully through the play which offers an extraordinary metaphor for Ireland.

McPherson illustrates the intricacy of male psyche especially when challenged by the female. By using the storytelling technique McPherson achieves a kind of entertainment which darkens and intensifies gradually. There is a defined a climactic order structure in the stories. The play's five stories are arranged as to become more personal and more unsettling than

the one before. Similarly Cummings notes that “the presence of the supernatural becomes progressively more real, tangible, and ominous.”(Cummings, 2000: 309). With the emotional impact of Valerie’s story, the weir collapses. The men are affected by her story and they experience a great deal of emotional breakthrough. Also, Valerie’s story followed by Jack’s transforms the play “from parody to elegy” (Meany, 2008). The entertaining stories finish with an elegiac note.

McPherson’s significance lies in the fact that he rewrites Celtic folk tales, ghosts and legends of the far distant past in postmodern Ireland. As a vital theatrical and literary voice, he captures the art of storytelling in his witty playscript of *The Weir* portraying the oppressive quiet of country life. While McPherson’s work for theatre is firmly grounded in the urban secular world in which he grew up, it has a much gentler, more complex relationship with the traditional Irish landscape and values. As an urban dramatist he explores the Irish imaginary and represents views of the rural west of Ireland. Dubliner McPherson is close to the romantic tradition of the literary revival. This is perhaps most evident in *The Weir* where he presents an almost idyllic version of the old community, represented by a group of people telling ghost stories in a pub.

In order to illustrate that Irish pub culture is specified with hospitality, good conversations and tall tales, McPherson has used the public bar as a source of melancholic assertion in *The Weir*. The play represents Irish culture by underlining the

fact that pubs are second homes for sad, solitary men especially in the countryside. The playwright wants the audience to feel the solitude of the Irish male deep-rooted in the spooky tales. The remoteness of the countryside in the West of Ireland offers McPherson the necessary insight and inspiration to introduce the dwellers of this topography. Although *The Weir* mostly underlines the native Irishmen’s diffidence, it reflects its author’s aspirations in combining the past and present, tradition and modernity, rural and urban Ireland. While doing this, McPherson also draws the contemporary audiences’ attention to the endangerment of one of Ireland’s most familiar institutions as the small country bar itself is disappearing at an alarming rate because of modern Irish lifestyles. For the contemporary audiences, *The Weir* evokes questions in the minds, reminding the fact or rather the changing trend that the new prosperous Ireland has little room for old-fashioned, country pubs. McPherson’s characters resist submission to the forces of globalization. However, they end up in isolation and their frustration can be traced in the supernatural tales where we explore their fears and alienation. Through dramatic monologues we get the true picture of this rural other Ireland with its passionate and innocent islanders. McPherson’s theatre, which he defines as “the most magical” storytelling art form, absorbs the audience and explores the characters’ fears in times of loneliness and alienation.

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